Minnekirken Memories

From

The Judicial diary of

Hon. Perry J. Gulbrandsen

When I returned from the war in Vietnam, I was called names, spit on, physically threatened and actually physically assaulted because of my marine uniform and the strong anti-war emotions of our fellow Americans.



What was happening? I was doing only what my country had asked of me. We had the draft and as an only child I could have avoided military service, but my country needed me so I volunteered and decided that I wanted to become an officer as the best way to help my country. So I researched it and learned that the hardest commission to enter was to become an officer in the United States Marine Corp.

I met this formidable challenge and several years later returned to the United States after having served in Vietnam and proud of being promoted to the rank of captain of marines in a 3-year period.

My welcome home ran the gamut from a physical attack in San Francisco to a Glenview police officer seeing me waiting at the train station at the air station, driving me home with lights flashing to a surprise return home to my mom and dad. The officer had opened his trunk, stashed my gear, opened my back seat door and said, “Welcome Home” after I had answered “Yes Sir” to his question “Are you fresh back?” He put all of his emergency lights on as he took me home. These two extremes happened with a 48-hour span.

What has happening? Why was I a target? I needed answers so I came back to my Minnekirken. I came back to the feel-good times of my youth. I came back to the challenge and comfort of my faith that had been led and groomed by my grandparents Johannes and Josefa Kauestand and my parents Peer and Esther Gulbrandsen.

My grandfather had been president to the congregation. In fact, I recall seeing a photograph of him and Knute Nelsen burning the mortgage to the smiles and satisfaction of the congregation.

I recall my grandmother and mother singing duets and solos in our large church choir and regularly and skillfully working the basement kitchen for special meals and our customary post service coffee and Norwegian treats.

I was baptized, confirmed, married and honed my bass choir voice skills at this red brick church in Logan Square (it seems like a circle). I came here to regain strength--to see and remember those powerful and comforting times. So I sat in the very last row for Norwegian Sunday services.

I entered and left quietly after remembering those times, taking in the altar, the pulpit, the lectern, the windows, the balcony, the two facing choir lofts, I realized that Minnekirken had helped to forge my character and internal compass and I knew that I could not be responsible for the conduct of others or the reasons for their conduct, only how I reacted to what was happening and what I did.

I refocused, went to law school, became a lawyer, became a judge, never forgetting my loyalty to my gratitude to, and my obligation to what Minnekirken has meant to me in my life.

My relationship to our Norwegian roots has never wavered. When asked to help, I did and some say successfully. But now as time has passed our community disperses, our interest diluted from the once focused and hearty Norwegian sense of ethnic cohesion and pride into now and ever diminishing corps of ethnic outposts and what yet remains is optimistically the renewed and DNA memory of how important this church in the square was and still is to many of us.

Protecting the shade of that memory is perhaps the price we pay for the guiding and protective spirit of our MInnekirken our church of memories.

If you are reading this, I have it on good medical authority that your hearts are slightly bigger than the average. We must do more.

God Jul!